

PDF hosted at the Radboud Repository of the Radboud University Nijmegen

The following full text is a publisher's version.

For additional information about this publication click this link.

<http://hdl.handle.net/2066/63464>

Please be advised that this information was generated on 2018-07-08 and may be subject to change.

and the Philippines as more mature, farsighted and generous. Yet the Dutch negotiators were frequently ahead of public opinion in the Netherlands so that even their minimal concessions were reduced and rendered unacceptable by the government in Europe. The failure of the Netherlands' policy was not just the fault of a few negotiators; the Dutch nation shared responsibility for the flawed policies toward the Indonesian Republic. This makes the book heavy reading for persons with strong national pride. The present reviewer spent one of his student years in the Netherlands during the time period covered here and sensed the strong feelings among the people he met with regard to 'Our East Indies', where the Dutch had done so much good. Such sentiments were surely not well-informed, certainly not with regard to the nationalist movement, but they formed a strong undercurrent of feeling in the Netherlands that the East Indies should be retained. Van den Doel notes that such sentiments toward Indonesia have changed radically in the past fifty years, and I believe him. But for anyone who retains the old sentiments of a mission in the East, this book is a hard pill to swallow.

However, the book is right and the sentiments wrong, and I am in agreement with the arguments and characterizations advanced by the author. Much of the mindset of the returning Hollanders was influenced by the events of the 1920s, when the budding national movement was suppressed and opportunities for Indonesians to assume productive roles in an integrated society were removed. Colonial control would remain immovable and concede virtually nothing to the struggle for independence. By 1945 this mindset proved an obstacle to facing the reality of the post-World War II situation. The generous gesture so badly needed was not to be found.

Bruce M. Knaft, *Exchanging the past; A rainforest world of before and after*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002, x + 303 pp. ISBN 0.226.44634.4. Price: USD 55 (hardback); ISBN 0.226.44635.2. Price: USD 20 (paperback).

ANTON PLOEG

Bruce Knaft is building an impressive oeuvre. In the course of seventeen years he has published five books and a large number of papers. The first book, *Good company and violence; Sorcery and social action in a lowland New Guinea society*, was an ethnography based on his field work among the Gebusi, who live to the east of the lower Strickland River. He subsequently published *South Coast New Guinea Cultures*, a comparative study of seven cultures in both eastern and western New Guinea, and then continued with two

theoretical works. The first of these, *Genealogies for the present*, is a lengthy review of current theoretical debates in the social sciences and of their importance to anthropological practice. The second, *From primitive to postcolonial in Melanesia and anthropology*, shifts the focus to Melanesia, reviewing the trajectory of Melanesian ethnography and its relationship to anthropology at large. Knauft argues strongly in favour of the continuation of ethnographic inquiry in the postcolonial era.

The book under review results from such inquiry. It records Knauft's second period of field collaboration with the Gebusi, in 1998, after an absence of over fifteen years. In the early 1980s, Knauft writes, the Gebusi 'were far more traditional than I had a right to expect' (p. 11). The most striking feature of their way of life was their aggression towards members of their own communities. They attributed each death resulting from disease to sorcery perpetrated by a group member, often a close kin or affinal relative. If convicted by divination, he or she was liable to be killed. At the time the people were dominated by the neighbouring Bedarnini; their survival as a separate cultural group seemed uncertain. When Knauft returned, most Gebusi were practising Christians. They associated sorcery with the 'world before', with a lifestyle they wanted to leave behind (p. 117). Instead, they wanted 'progress'; that is to say they wanted to participate more effectively in the modern society that Australians had started introducing in their part of New Guinea. For the Gebusi in the late 1990s, becoming 'modern' had become a moral imperative. They were still convinced about the efficacy of sorcery, but sorcery accusations were now handled by the police and might lead to jail sentences.

The Gebusi live, however, in one of the last areas to be incorporated into the state of Papua New Guinea. They have remained peripheral. Accordingly, Gebusi have painfully little chance of progressing. Knauft skilfully handles the resulting predicaments. His object of analysis is the Gebusi social world in which he rightly includes government and church representatives. His scrutiny of the roles of policemen, elementary school teachers and pastors is exemplary. Moreover, Knauft follows the trend that many other Melanesian ethnographers have recently adhered to: they are explicit about their interactions and their emotional involvement with the people among whom they carry out their research.

Knauft underestimates, in my view, the extent to which anthropologists have 'seriously engaged the impact of modernization as ideology' (p. 49). Admittedly the topic has been researched by scholars from disciplines other than anthropology, an early example being S.W. Reed with his *The making of modern New Guinea* (1942). Apart from the impact of such studies, a number of anthropologists—Belshaw, Maher, Mead, Schoorl, Schwartz and others—have addressed the issue since the Second World War. A comparative study of these efforts, undertaken by a scholar like Knauft, would be most welcome.

A major analytical tool employed by Knauft is 'agency'. In his opinion the Gebusi showed 'recessive agency', which he defines as 'willingly pursued actions that put actors in a position of subordination, passivity and patient

·waiting for the influences or enlightenment of external authority figures' (p.

40). He tellingly demonstrates its occurrence in practically all the contexts in which the Gebusi interact with external agents. But he also stresses that the Gebusi showed more active agency in social situations that allowed them more leeway. This was apparent especially in the staging at Nomad government station of 42 skits (not all Gebusi ones) during the 1998 Independence Day celebrations. Even though many of the skits put the pre-contact way of life in an unfavourable light, Knauft's account shows the Gebusi on this occasion as creative and reflective rather than as passive and patiently waiting. In their handling of Christianity, too, the stance taken by the Gebusi cannot be described as recessive. Their conversion, Knauft writes, was 'almost intrinsically partial' (p. 171). Not all the Gebusi converted, and converts did not stigmatize those who did not (pp. 151-2). In villages away from the government station, traditional ceremonies were still performed and converts from elsewhere attended and took part.

Knauft regrets that many Gebusi had a negative view of their previous way of life. At the same time he realizes that what he observed in 1998 might well turn out to be a phase in the Gebusi perception of their pre-contact ways. In the concluding chapter of the book, Knauft repeats his argument that ethnography remains 'crucial', not just as a record of stasis or of flux, but also as a way of documenting and comparing developmental trends. The book under review is a case in point. It is richly documented, full of theoretical asides, the 'photographic galleries' expediently complement the text, and the endnotes too are crammed with information. In short, a most commendable book.

Nicolaas George Bernhard Gouka, *De petitie-Soetardjo; Een Hollandse misser in Indie? (1936-1938)*. Amsterdam: Rozenberg, 303 pp. ISBN 90.5170.549.2. Price: EUR 18.

HARRY A. POEZE

De petitie-Soetardjo is in de Indonesische geschiedenis vastgelegd als een gemiste laatste kans van het Nederlandse koloniale bestuur om tot overeenstemming te komen met het Indonesische nationalistische streven. Op 15 juli 1936 diende het gezagsgetrouwe, maar kritische Volksraadlid, eerder een hoog bestuursambtenaar in de inheemse rangen, en van traditioneel-aristocratische achtergrond, zijn voorstel in waarin op termijn